

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2015*

**Remarks at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Annual Awards Gala**  
*October 8, 2015*

*Audience member.* I love you!

*The President.* I love you back. *Buenas noches!* Well, it is good to be here. Thank you, Secretary Castro, not just for the introduction, but for the great work he is doing on behalf of the American people every single day. Thank you to your chair, Linda Sanchez, for her outstanding leadership in the Congress. Thank you to all of you for having me here tonight.

*Audience member.* Thank you!

*The President.* Thank you! I'd like to begin my remarks with a story.

*Audience member.* I love you!

*The President.* I love you too! [*Laughter*] But look, I've got to tell you this story here. So on an evening about 75 years ago, in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, a young man proposed to the woman of his dreams.

Any of us who've done that—and I have—[*laughter*]—know at that moment he was feeling pretty nervous. And fortunately for him, she said yes. And because apparently he was making the kind of money I was making when I proposed—[*laughter*]—to celebrate, they went to a hot dog stand. Things were simpler back then. But things took a wrong turn. Authorities suddenly pulled up, lined them up, patted them down, demanded to see their IDs, just because they were Mexican American. And when the young man handed over his wallet, the officer pulled the cards out of it and just dropped them on the sidewalk, and then he said, "Now you pick them up."

"I remember getting on my knees and picking them up," that young man said decades later. And we can imagine his fear and his humiliation. What had been a beautiful day had suddenly become an example of occurrences that were happening far too often. And imagine how easy it would have been for him at that moment to turn to despair and to allow the anger and the resentment to feed a cynicism and for him to decide that America could never change.

But that young man was named Ed Roybal. And Ed Roybal never lost faith in himself or in his country. And less than 25 years after he was brought to his knees on the streets of Los Angeles, Ed stood under the Capitol Dome to represent those very same streets in the Congress of the United States of America. He dedicated his life to the idea that America can change, that our Union can become more perfect. And today, his legacy lives on not only in the legislation he passed and the improvements he made in his district, but also in his daughter Lucille, who is here tonight. And he helped start the Congressional Hispanic Caucus because he knew that we are stronger together than we could ever be alone.

And that's the same reason I ran for this office 8 years ago, not because I believed in what I could do, but because I believed in what we could do together. The financial crisis hadn't even hit yet, and we came to understand it was going to make our job a lot harder. But thanks to the members of the Hispanic Caucus, thanks to people like Nancy Pelosi—who is standing here tonight—thanks to the determination and fundamental optimism of the American people, we have made progress.

When I took office, the unemployment rate was on its way to 10 percent. Today, it's 5.1 percent. The unemployment rate among Latinos hit 13 percent, and we've brought that down to 6.4 percent. When I took office, we were losing about 800,000 jobs a month. Today, our businesses have created jobs for a record 67 months in a row, more than 13 million new jobs overall.

When I took office, more than 15 percent of Americans, including nearly one in three Hispanics, lacked health insurance. Today, we've covered another 17 million Americans, including 4 million Latinos, and only 9.2 percent of Americans are uninsured. For the first time on record, more than 90 percent of Americans have health insurance. For the first time ever, insurance companies can't discriminate against anybody with a preexisting condition.

When I took office, we were still too often stuck in a cold war mentality that began before many of us were even born. And today, for the sake of our people, and our entire hemisphere, we have reestablished relations with Cuba, we have turned the page on the failed policies of the past. We have strengthened our relationship with Latin America. We've put forward a plan to invest \$1 billion in our shared security and prosperity in Central America.

When I took office, hardworking young people—Americans in every way but on paper—lived in constant fear of deportation. Today, more than 680,000 DREAMers live and study and work freely and openly in the country they've always called home. We've got smarter enforcement priorities, because it makes no sense to focus on separating families when we can be going after felons instead. We're taking new steps to reach out to folks who are eligible to become citizens and attract immigrant entrepreneurs and educate STEM students. We're going to help more husbands and wives of American citizens get their green cards without separating them from their families. And the deferred action policies I announced last year will help millions of mothers and fathers remain in the United States of America with their families, and although it is taking us longer than we hoped, I know we're on the right side of the law, and we are going to keep fighting to prove it.

And we haven't won every battle. We've still got a lot more work to do. But when the cynics told us we couldn't change our country for the better, they were wrong. There are more job openings today than at any time in our history. The high school dropout rate is near the lowest on record, and Latino students are making some of the fastest gains. More Americans are graduating from college. The deficits are down by two-thirds. The amount of foreign oil we buy is down. Teen pregnancy is down.

Which—all of which makes you wonder: Why are some of the folks who are running for my office so down on America? [*Laughter*]

*Audience member.* What about you?

*The President.* Well, no, I'm definitely not doing that. [*Laughter*] But by most measures, we are better off now than we were 7 years ago. And that we know. Of course, none of it comes up in their debates. I mean, they have invented this new reality where everything was terrific back in 2008—[*laughter*]—when the unemployment and uninsured rates were rising and DREAMers lived in fear of deportation and we were engaged in two wars and bin Laden was still at large. That was the golden era, apparently, the good old days. [*Laughter*] And then, I came along and messed it all up. [*Laughter*]

And now when you listen to them, you still don't know what they're for except turning back the clock on the work that we've done together: repealing Obamacare, gutting Wall Street

reform, allowing power plants to pollute the air our children breathe. And there is nowhere where they want to go further backwards than on immigration.

It wasn't that long ago that my predecessor, George W. Bush, a Republican—a conservative Republican from Texas, with whom I disagreed with on a whole lot of things, made immigration reform one of his core priorities. "We cannot build a unified country," he said, "by inciting people to anger or playing on anyone's fears or exploiting the issue of immigration for political gain." That's what he said.

Think how much better our economy would be if the rest of his party got the message. *[Laughter]* Think about how much better off our country would be if Republican politicians hadn't spent years precisely trying to scare voters with tales of immigrants flooding across our borders and taking our jobs and destroying America as we know it, even though we know that when you look at what's happening at the borders, it's the lowest rates of immigration that we've seen since the 1970s. A clear majority of Americans, including a lot of Republican voters, support reform. That's one of the reasons we got a bipartisan bill through the Senate in 2013. But now some of the very same Republican politicians who championed reform in the past—some of whom sponsored these efforts—suddenly, they want nothing to do with it.

*Audience members.* Hmm!

*The President.* Hmm. *[Laughter]* In these circumstances, I always say, don't boo, vote.

They can't hear the boos, but they can hear your vote. But the point is, that's not leadership: turning against what's right the moment the politics of your base gets tough. Leadership is not fanning the flames of intolerance and then acting all surprised when a fire breaks out. Saying clearly inflammatory things and then saying, well, that's not what I meant—until you do it again and again and again. So we've got to decide whether or not we, as Americans, are willing to stand up against this kind of bigotry that—the same cruel impulse that Ed Roybal spent a lifetime fighting against.

The anti-immigrant sentiment that has infected our politics is not new, but it is wrong. It was directed at Irish folk. It was directed against Italians. There have been generations of immigrants that have been subject to this same kind of attitude, with some of the same stereotypes. It wasn't right then; it's not right now. And unless you were one of the First Americans—unless you're Navajo or Cherokee—somebody somewhere came from someplace else.

I believe we need an immigration system that is fair and orderly and lawful. I believe that people who come here illegally should have to pay a fine and pay their fair share of taxes and get registered and get right with the law and go to the back of the line before they earn citizenship. But when I hear folks talking as if somehow those kids are different from my kids, as if they're less worthy in the eyes of God, that somehow their families are less worthy of our respect and consideration and care, as if somehow back in the day, everybody had their papers in order when they came here, but now suddenly, nobody has their papers in order—I believe we're better than that.

If you want to be taken seriously as a leader, you can't just be against everything. You've got to be for something. You can't just feed on fear. You should be feeding hope. You should be for fixing our immigration system. You should be for allowing DREAMers and their parents, who have been here for years, to live without fear in the country they love. You should tell the truth, which is that illegal border crossings are lower than they've been in decades and that economists agree that immigration does not hurt our economy, it grows our economy, creating

jobs, raising wages for Americans. You don't hear those facts very often, but those facts—those are facts.

And you've got to recognize that America's greatness does not come from building walls. Our greatness comes from building opportunity. Our greatness comes from building an economy that works for everybody. Our greatness comes from a dream that says in this country, if you work hard, you can build a better life for your family. No matter where you come from. No matter what you look like. No matter what your last name is. That's what makes America great.

So I'm going to spend every day that I have left in this office fighting to restore that dream so that everyone who works hard can get ahead. And, yes, that includes immigration reform. But that's not all that we've got to do. We've got to keep creating good jobs. We've got to make sure every family feels our country's recovery in their own lives, and that includes the families in Puerto Rico. We've got to make 2 years of college as free and universal as high school is today. We've got to stop spending billions of taxpayer dollars keeping nonviolent drug offenders behind bars and give them a chance to get right and back on the right track. We've got to make sure that every child gets a world-class education from an earliest age, that every person who's still uninsured gets covered, that every school and every street is safe from the madness of gun violence.

And this change will not be easy because change never is. Change is never easy. It takes longer than 1 year. It takes longer than one term. It takes longer than the tenure of one President. But what we together have shown and proven is that when we stick together and put our shoulders to the wheel of history, not only is change possible, change is inevitable. America can change. And if we keep dreaming of something better and organizing for something better, if we keep voting for something better, together we're going to build on the progress we've made. We're going to create a brighter future for our children. *Si, se puede. Juntos podemos!*

Thank you, CHC—thank you, CHCI. *Que Dios los bendiga*. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:55 p.m. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, annual awards gala.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Bush, George W.; Castro, Julián; Pelosi, Nancy; Roybal-Allard, Lucille; Sanchez, Linda T.

*Subjects:* Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Children and youth : Teen pregnancy rate; Civil rights : Minorities :: Racial profiling; Civil rights : Minorities :: Relations with police; Congress : Congressional Hispanic Caucus; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute; Cuba : Relations with U.S.; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : High school dropout rate and prevention programs; Education : Postsecondary education :: College opportunity, expansion efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Foreign sources; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Housing and Urban Development, Department of : Secretary; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Law

enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Law enforcement and crime :  
Gun violence, prevention efforts.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD201500709.